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Football hooliganism, the death drive and Millwall fandom as symbolic masochism

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Abstract

Despite their reputation for violence and hooligan behaviour, south-east London's Millwall football club has sustained a strong fan base thanks significantly to the siege mentality that has developed around its supporters. This siege mentality is fuelled largely by the antipathy of wider society; by undertaking a Freudian analysis of Millwall fandom as it was during the zenith of the club's notoriety in the 1970s and 1980s, it is possible to view this collective persecution complex as a manifestation internalized masochism described in the philosopher's 'death drive' theory. Combined with a Lacanian interpretation of the death drive, it is possible to perceive Millwall fandom as a form of symbolic masochism, explaining to some degree the continued support for a team treated a consistently pejorative manner.

Keywords

football

Millwall

Freud

Lacan

hooligans

violence

Introduction

Perhaps more than in any other professional sport, European football fans have cultivated a distinct reputation for tribalism that has regularly manifested in the form of violence and so-called 'hooligan' behaviour. Although this reputation for hooliganism is by no means restricted to any particular team or country, fans of south London football team Millwall have often found themselves as the standard-bearers for this ultraviolent expression of fandom. The cultural depiction of Millwall supporters as hooligans was undoubtedly bolstered by a number of high-profile incidences throughout the 1970s and 1980s, including the 1985 Kenilworth Road riot and an altercation with Arsenal fans in 1988 labelled 'the Battle of Highbury' by the British media. To a significant degree, Millwall fans of the 1970s and 1980s inspired the stereotypical image of the football hooligan that developed throughout the late twentieth century; inevitably this portrayal of Millwall supporters as the archetypal thugs of English football served to stigmatize both the club and the local area itself.

In the years since hooliganism first attracted the attention of mainstream society, Millwall has become synonymous with antisocial behaviour and violence at football matches. Despite this highly pejorative perception of the club within the community, Millwall continues to enjoy strong support as a result of the inherent tribalism that exists at the core of its fan base. In football, as in any subculture, tribalism can often be fostered in circumstances where social stratification has acted to marginalize a particular group; in the case of Millwall supporters, it is clear that a sense of group identity has formed as a direct response to the perception that they are naturally violent troublemakers. Rather than reject

this portrayal Millwall supporters largely embraced this reputation during the formative period of fandom identity that transpired in the 1970s and 1980s, going so far as to adopt chants and slogans that reflect their group identity as the working-class villains of English football. The desire to actively identify as part of a group that is generally disliked within the community is far from unique – rather, it reflects a somewhat masochistic tendency within Millwall supporters described in Freudian theory as ‘Thanatos’ or ‘the death drive’. If viewed through this Freudian prism, the shared group identity of Millwall fans in this era can be understood as a reasonable reaction to the marginalization they experienced during the initial rise of hooliganism within the cultural zeitgeist. In effect, the social stratification they experienced in the 1970s and 1980s served to solidify a group identity within Millwall fandom, with supporters bonded through their collective experience of being ostracized and marginalized within the community.

Background

Home territory south of the river

Despite sharing its name with an area in London’s East End, the Millwall football club has played their home games south of the river Thames for the majority of its history. After failing to secure a regular home ground around Millwall, the club commissioned a stadium to be built roughly 6km away in the suburb of New Cross (Woods 2011). Given that the team moved into this new stadium in 1910, the vast majority of modern Millwall fans originate in an area relatively far removed from the area that their team is named for; instead of coming from the Isle of Dogs, supporters of Millwall football club tend to come from areas closer to New Cross such as Lewisham, Peckham, Bermondsey and Southwark (King and Knight 1999). Prior to Millwall’s relocation to south London, the area had

already established a firm reputation as an undesirable part of the British capital. Its close proximity to both the urban markets and pastoral land made suburbs south of the river a perfect location to establish a factory, tannery or similar industrial enterprise; as a result south London became heavily identified with the working classes and perceived as a haven for criminals, alcoholics and the disreputable element within British society (Quindlen 2004).

The working-class identity of south London persisted in the years that followed, with the region surrounding Millwall's home stadium experiencing some of the worst effects of the unemployment crisis that faced the United Kingdom throughout the late 1970s and 1980s. During the premiership of Margaret Thatcher, the national unemployment rate boomed to more than three million. A significant number of those affected by rising unemployment came from the type of industries supplying work in areas of south London like steel, shipping and manufacturing; between 1970 and 1990, the percentage of the country's gross domestic product derived from manufacturing dropped from 20.57 per cent to 15.18 per cent (Anon. 2013). It is not a coincidence that Millwall truly began to develop its reputation as a club populated by violent hooligans at a time when its largely working-class fans were facing the greatest unemployment crisis in a generation; instead, the public perception of football hooligans in the 1970s and 1980s was largely informed by the stereotypical image of a jobless, uneducated and often drunken labourer typically originating from working-class areas like those south of the river (Watt 2006). Although south London's notoriety was established long before the unemployment crisis of the late twentieth century, social stratification that occurred during the period undoubtedly contributed to the clichéd media

depiction of football hooligans and the general acceptance that they would indeed originate from areas similar to the fans of a club like Millwall.

The rising tide of hooliganism

Although it is difficult to pinpoint the very first incident of fan violence at a football match, historical evidence indicates that incidents of hooliganism took place as early as the fourteenth century. The game itself was banned by English monarch Edward II in 1314 due to establishment concerns that clashes between supporters would lead to the spread of further social unrest (Braunwart and Carroll 1980). Isolated incidences of violence persisted in the years that followed the lifting of this sanction; however the foundations of modern hooliganism did not begin to take root until the late 1800s; although they had not yet acquired the label of ‘hooligans’, fans at an 1885 tie between Preston North End and Aston Villa reportedly attacked players after the match leading to one Preston player losing consciousness (Dunning 1981). This type of pitch invasion was common in English football throughout the 1880s; however, a clash between Preston fans and Queen’s Park FC supporters at a railway station in 1886 marked the first recorded instance of football-related violence taking place away from a match venue (Layton and Pacey 2016). This rise of violence between fans outside the confines of a football match marked a critical transition in the nature of hooliganism: rather than being a direct result of on-pitch activity, hooliganism became a more tribal form of group identification that was often only tangentially related to the performance of the team that they were nominally supporting (Kerr 1994).

Football-related violence became commonplace throughout the twentieth century; however, the term ‘hooliganism’ only rose to prominence within mainstream society

during the mid-1960s. By the 1970s, groups of football fans interested in violent conflict began to formally organize into 'firms' with their own unique identity and an explicit mission statement; by the end of the decade, most top-flight teams and a range of lower-tier teams had developed their own firm dedicated to violently attacking supporters of opposing teams (Worthen 2012). Hooliganism can be differentiated from general affray due to the significant level of tribalism that underpins the informal codes of behaviour that exist within it. Violence perpetrated by hooliganism is triggered and guided by group identification: rather than acting in a reckless manner, hooligans in the context of European football select targets based on their overt affiliation with an opposing team (Goodhead 2012). As such, there is typically little intra-fandom violence between supporters of the same football team; instead, an 'us-versus-them' scenario takes shape that seemingly gives purpose to hooliganism and allows it to be viewed through the prism of historic rivalry and tradition rather than wanton violence in-and-of itself.

Football hooliganism in the United Kingdom escalated significantly during the 1980s, leading Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher to establish a judicial inquiry into the increasing trend of fan violence. An interim report of the Popplewell Committee went so far as to suggest that football 'may not be able to continue in its present form much longer' unless issues of hooliganism were addressed (Stewart 2013). After an incident in which 39 fans of Italian team Juventus were crushed to death during a European Cup Final between their team and English side Liverpool FC. The incident occurred after Liverpool fans ran towards opposing supporters at Heysel Stadium in Belgium, with Juventus fans trying to escape the violence being crushed by a wall (Mullen 2015). As a result of this tragedy, football governing body UEFA took action by banning all English teams from participating

in European football competitions; despite the ban not being lifted until 1990, hooliganism in the United Kingdom continued unabated throughout the late 1980s.

F-Troop, Bushwackers and Millwall hooligans

More than any other team in the English competition, supporters of Millwall football club have risen to prominence as the archetypal hooligan. Although this reputation may be somewhat overstated, it is unquestionable that hooligans associated with Millwall have been at the epicentre of many of the most notorious incidences of football-related violence throughout the club's history. The fierce rivalry between Millwall fans and those of east London-based West Ham United can be traced back over a century, with an outbreak of violence recorded between dock-workers supporting both teams during a match at Upton Park in 1906; although hooliganism had not yet fully taken hold in English football at the time, Millwall fans were regularly cited for unruly behaviour throughout the early twentieth century and had their home ground closed on several occasions as a result of crowd disturbances during matches (Maguire 2006). Millwall fans continued to cultivate a negative reputation within the football community into the 1960s after a match against Brentford during which a non-functional hand grenade was thrown at Brentford goalkeeper Chic Brodie (Woods 2011). With the hooligans of firms across the country beginning to organize, Millwall hooligans formed a group initially known as F-Troop that would later become known as the notorious Millwall Bushwackers; the Bushwackers quickly established themselves as one of the most feared firms in English football due to their reputation for brutality and ability to create anarchy at football matches (Redhead 2015). Millwall's identification with hooliganism increased in public prominence after the club was featured in a documentary broadcasted by the BBC in 1977 that drew a connection

between Millwall supporters and far-right political party the National Front (Clare 1977). Hooligan activity by Millwall supporters continued into the early 1980s, with chairman Alan Thorne threatening to close the club down completely in 1982 after a series of violent altercations brought the team into further disrepute (Storr 2013). By the mid-1980s Millwall had already established itself as a key example of Britain's hooligan element; however, this perception was further solidified in the aftermath of the 1985 Kenilworth Road riot. During a sixth-round FA Cup match at Luton Town, fighting broke out between rival firms that resulted in projectiles being thrown onto the field and several pitch invasions; although Millwall's firm the Bushwackers was only one of several firms involved in the altercation, the club was fined £7500 by the FA for not taking appropriate precautions (Osborne 2013). The Kenilworth Road riot cemented Millwall hooligans as the embodiment of the troubles facing football in the 1980s and was bolstered by further incidents including the 1988 'Battle of Highbury' in which 41 members of the Bushwackers were arrested after clashing with members of Arsenal firm The Herd (Anon. 2014). Millwall hooligans became less active through the 1990s and 2000s; however, several significant clashes such as the 2009 Upton Park riot have continued to garner media coverage and perpetuate the image of Millwall supporters as quintessential football hooligans (Irvine 2009).

Methodology

In order to examine the link Millwall fandom and the club's reputation for hooliganism, it is imperative that a thorough qualitative study takes place accounting for a wide-range of social factors that may have some significance. There is limited scope to engage with the issue through a grounded theory approach drawing on empirical data highlighting the

socio-economic conditions faced by many Millwall supporters during key periods of hooliganism like the 1970s and 1980s (Charmaz 2011). This type of research would go some way towards understanding the circumstances in which hooliganism can flourish and create a context for the unique bond enjoyed by Millwall supporters. This grounded theory approach should be supplemented by a critical media analysis examining representations of the Millwall football club and its supporters across several mediums; this is particularly relevant when it comes to analysing the mainstream tabloid press, particularly given statements made by club officials blaming pejorative media coverage for Millwall's negative reputation (Porter 2010).

Aside from conducting an evaluation of existing secondary sources, it is important to engage with some form of ethnographic research when attempting to determine the motivations of any collective. By physically going to Millwall's home stadium The New Den and interacting with a broad cross section of the club's supporters, it is possible to gain further insight as to whether hooliganism remains a fundamental aspect of being a Millwall supporter. In conducting such an ethnographic observation, it is essential to consider the perspective of both fans who identify with the hooligan element and those that do not; in doing so, it is possible to determine the mentality of the average Millwall supporter far more accurately (Goetz and LeCompte 1982). In order to truly understand the cause and effect of hooliganism, it is not simply enough to examine prominent incidents involving Millwall supporters; instead, a holistic ethnography would account for the social factors that are undoubtedly relevant in explaining both the propensity for hooliganism by the club's fans and the cultural prejudice that is regularly directed towards members of Britain's working classes (Jacob 1988).

In spite of the fact that Millwall's hooligan element has attracted considerable attention both in academic scholarship and popular literature, there has been little attempt to apply a psycho-social model to explain the persistent drive to participate in violent action that reinforces negative stereotypes that have existed since the 1970s at least. Simplistic attempts to reconcile the place of violence in Millwall fandom have largely taken a behaviouristic approach that does not give over any major focus to the motivations of this behaviour (Ikonen and Rechartt 1978). Freud's concept of Thanatos seems a natural fit in any psychoanalytical interpretation of violent human behaviours, suggesting as it does that the drive towards destruction is a central underlying motivator for a range of negative actions (Freud 1987). To apply Freud's Thanatos to Millwall hooliganism as it stands would be no better than taking a behaviouristic approach to the subject, and thus needs to be clarified and interpreted further in order to be applicable. For this reason, Lacan's symbolic interpretation of Thanatos was selected as the primary prism through which Millwall hooliganism could be analysed. Whereas the original Freudian theory refers to biological and base instincts towards destruction, Lacan (1966) draws on his extensive experience in symbology and semantics to reinterpret Thanatos as symbolic rather than literal death. Lacan's interpretation is far more applicable to Millwall fandom, regardless of the literal violence and destruction that occurs in football hooliganism: the focus of this article is less on the impact of the violence itself than it is on the reasons for choosing to participate in the Millwall fandom despite the pejorative implications of doing so. Given that the focus of this interpretation is more on the engagement with fandom than it is on football-related violence, Lacan provides a far better paradigm through which Thanatos could be applied to the seemingly masochistic action of simply being a Millwall fan.

Literature review

Given the considerable social impact of football hooliganism, it is unsurprising that a broad cross section of literature exists that attempts to analyse the phenomenon through a variety of sociocultural paradigms. Roger Ingham explored the issue in great detail as early as 1978 in *Football Hooliganism: The Wider Context*, a compilation that covered several aspects of the subject at a time when organized hooliganism was still a relatively new cultural trend. The relevance of the media in shaping the image of the hooligan was also being explored as early as 1978 in Stuart Hall's contribution to *Football Hooliganism: The Wider Context* titled 'The treatment of football hooliganism in the press'; this chapter served to explore the idea that British hooliganism was afflicted by an 'amplification spiral' wherein exaggerated coverage of an issue inherently made the problem worse in reality. Preeminent scholar of sport sociology Eric Dunning has written extensively on football hooliganism, contributing significantly to modern understanding of the subject by creating an academic understanding known as 'the Leicester school'; the Leicester school involved a figurational analysis of hooliganism and attempted to provide a sociological basis for participation in football-related violence (Dunning et al. 1986). Dunning's approach to hooliganism is supported in contemporaneous academic output like that of Richard Giulianotti, whose 1995 article on the challenges of ethnographic studies on football hooliganism highlighted a number of potential problems faced by researchers in the field. Due to their well-established reputation for hooliganism, a number of researchers have specifically focused on Millwall supporters in an attempt to determine the root causes of football-related violence. This evaluation of Millwall fandom took considerable guidance from previous publications that examined the phenomenon of hooliganism; Maguire's

2006 article 'Millwall and the making of football's folk devils: Revisiting the Leicester period' sought to critically interpret the seminal work of Dunning and his team within the context of the modern game. The idea that Millwall supporters share a defined group identity with violent foundations has also been expanded on in a number of publications including Garry Robson's (2001) contribution to compilation *Fear and Loathing in World Football*; Robson's essay 'The lion roars: Myth, identity and Millwall fandom' asserted that Millwall supporters are a heavily mythologized group whose connection to hooliganism extend beyond football to the club's working-class roots. Denis Campbell and Andrew Shields further explored the links between Millwall fandom and its cultural context in their contribution to a 2000 book edited by Robson; in 'The Millwall myth and its urban context: South-east London as the land that time forgot', Campbell and Shields attempted to provide a sociocultural framework for Millwall's violent reputation and the extent to which it is justified.

In order to assess the extent to which Millwall fandom is linked to the Thanatos theory, it is important to consider the source material in considerable depth. Sigmund Freud outlined his evolving theoretical understanding of human behaviour in his 1920 essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*; this publication marked a clear shift in Freudian philosophy through its introduction of the 'death drive', which Freud described as a seemingly masochistic urge towards self-destruction through violence and aggression. Freud's belief in the death drive – referred to as 'Thanatos' – was adopted and explored in greater depth by other notable academics including pre-eminent psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. Lacan took the Thanatos theory a step further in *Ecrits* (1966) by removing it from the bounds of biological imperative; in Lacan's view, the death drive existed within the symbolic realm and could

be applied to the response of human beings to the prevailing culture. Aside from these formative interpretations by Freud and Lacan, more recent academic research has sought to analyse the death drive. Daniel Cho explored the affinities between Freud and Lacan's theories in a 2006 article on the Thanatos theory, proposing that the two philosophies are essentially the 'dialectical complement' of each other. More pertinently for a study of football hooliganism, Ikonen and Rechart's 1978 article 'The vicissitudes of Thanatos' concerned itself with the place of aggression and destructiveness in psychoanalysis through the Freudian prism. This type of literature supports the notion that a violent phenomenon like hooliganism can be examined through the Freudian prism in order to determine the kind of reasoning that drives a group towards ritualized aggression.

Discussion

Homogeneity within the British white working class

The stereotypical depiction of a quintessential football hooligan has long been established as a cultural trope within British society. More often than not, the term 'hooligan' conjures the image of a white, working-class male aged roughly between his late teenage years and early adulthood; although statistical and anecdotal evidence would suggest otherwise, the connection between the white working classes and hooliganism has had a significant impact on wider societal understanding of the phenomenon and the environment in which it is incubated (Tyler 2008). Racializing the issue of hooliganism seriously impacted upon supporters of many football teams, perhaps none more so than followers of Millwall. Given the club's geographical base in underprivileged south London and its traditionally white working-class fan base, the typical Millwall supporter perfectly fit the mould of a hooligan that had entered into the cultural zeitgeist. To a certain degree, the relative homogeneity of

Millwall supporters contributed to both an increased incidence of cultural discrimination and their propensity to form strong bonds within the collective. Although it meant they were easily caricatured and demonized as stereotypical hooligans, their shared sociocultural background allowed Millwall fans to form bonds based on a common understanding of both the world-at-large and their communities position within wider society (Campbell and Shields 2000). It is often suggested that institutionalized racism can be found at the foundations of Millwall's hooligan subsect, most prominently in a 1977 BBC report drawing connections between the club and the National Front (Clare 1977). Although it is undoubtedly true that casual racism is commonplace, this unfortunate trend should serve as a reminder of the inherent homogeneity of Millwall supporters and their lack of exposure to multiculturalism within the relatively closed community of south-east London (Watt 2006).

Further contributing to the construction of Millwall fans as the archetypal football hooligans were the preconceived prejudices that existed regarding the white working classes in the United Kingdom during the latter half of the twentieth century. The rise of modern hooliganism occurred at roughly time that white, working-class Britons were facing the worst economic circumstances of the post-war era. During the early 1980s unemployment in the United Kingdom reached a peak of over three million, with a considerable portion of the newly unemployed coming from traditionally working-class industries like manufacturing and shipping (Anon. 2013). Combined with the pre-existing notion that south London was the epicentre of violence and depravity within British culture, the local residents that largely made up the Millwall fan base already faced considerable social marginalization outside their cultural depiction as violent hooligans. Beider claimed

that Britain's white working classes were 'expected to behave in a predictable way' due to their regular portrayal as a homogenous group existing on the fringes of mainstream British society (2015: 20). It is this assumed predictability that gave rise to the tacit belief that the working classes were more likely to engage in hooliganism than members of any other social strata; if the prevailing cultural depiction of a football hooligan was that of white working-class male, it would stand to reason that a club like Millwall would be amongst the worst offenders when it came to football-related violence.

Siege mentality and the formation of groupthink

As with any disenfranchised subculture within society, the British working classes clearly demonstrate a propensity towards aggressive defensiveness often described as a 'siege mentality'. A siege mentality occurs in populations wherein there is a widespread perception that external forces are actively conspiring against their community; this state of mind is often likened to a collective manifestation of a persecution complex, whether or not the feeling of victimization is valid or not (Bar-Tal 2012). It is in this respect that the principles of groupthink can be seen to be intrinsically linked with the formation of a siege mentality; even when victimization is imagined or exaggerated, the tendency of group members to conform to the overarching thought process of the collective overrides rationality in order to achieve some form of consensus (Janis 1971). The tendency of the white working classes to hold collective viewpoints on a range of issues could – in one respect – be seen as the logical outcome of a shared sociocultural upbringing; conversely, it could alternatively be perceived as the kind of groupthink that would lead to the claims of predictability described by Beider. Although he did not accept this portrayal of the white working classes, Beider acknowledged the commonly held view that this community was

‘essentialised as representing the lumpen proletariat, devoid of rational thinking, backward and resistant to change’ (2015: 20). Despite being overly simplistic, this particularly pejorative understanding of the white working classes serves to reinforce the siege mentality in multiple ways. If taken as a valid interpretation, it stands to reason that a lack of rational thought within the working classes would leave them vulnerable to the influence of groupthink; if rejected, this perspective would provide justification to the belief that the wider community sought to denigrate or marginalize members of the white working classes.

As the term ‘siege mentality’ would suggest, the collective sense of victimization experienced by those populations where this phenomenon is prevalent can often result in an aggressive and militaristic response. This is particularly evident when it comes to those supporters of Millwall football club that are actively engaged in hooligan behaviour. Despite claims that Millwall’s connection to football-related violence are overblown and exaggerated, it is undoubtable that a defined hierarchal structure existed within Millwall’s hooligan element that in many ways mimicked that of a traditional military organization. In the widely condemned BBC documentary *F Troop, Treatment and the Half-Way Line*, self-confessed hooligans associated with Millwall outlined three levels of hooliganism that existed amongst supporters of the club to varying degrees. Younger fans became members of ‘The half-way line’, whereas the vast majority of fans engaged in football-related violence were members of ‘Treatment’; these subgroups allegedly did not incite violence, instead travelling with the team to away games and engaging in ‘rucking’ only when the opportunity presented itself (Clare 1977). The documentary differentiated these supporters from the members of ‘F-Troop’, which it described as ‘nutters’ that were the first to cause

conflict whether they were at Millwall matches or unrelated games involving the team's key rivals (Clare 1977). In effect, F-Troop – later known as 'the Bushwackers' – served as the special forces unit of Millwall's hooligan army and most conformed to the general public's perception that an epidemic of football-related violence was occurring across the United Kingdom (Steen 2016). Rather than simply providing a convenient metaphor, the siege mentality evident within supporters of Millwall football club manifested in a truly militaristic manner; it formed the basis for the defensiveness and collective aggression that resulted in the deep connection with hooliganism that exists at the core of their group identity.

'No One Likes Us, We Don't Care' – Football chants as a form of resistance

The use of terminology like 'F-Troop' to identify members of Millwall's hooligan element represented an explicit parallel with traditional military organizations; however, this is not the only example of symbolic linguistics used by the club's supporters in response to their perceived victimization. More than in any other professional sport, organized crowd chanting plays a significant role in the supporter experience surrounding football matches. Chants can be used in a variety of ways, whether to celebrate the success of a team on the pitch or to disparage opposing teams and their supporters (Bensimon and Bodner 2011); chanting by Millwall fans typically falls somewhere within this binary system, with the major exception of club anthem 'No One Likes Us, We Don't Care'. Originating in the late 1970s, 'No One Likes Us' became more than just another chant for Millwall fans feeling ostracized in the wake of the BBC's documentary on hooliganism. The chant essentially became a form of passive resistance against the wider societal condemnation of their club and its supporters, choosing to not 'care' about this criticism rather than actively work

towards rehabilitating the group's reputation (Clark 2006). Anthems undoubtedly play a significant role in the foundation of a group identity; that Millwall supporters readily adopted a chant that specifically acknowledged their negative reputation indicates that a siege mentality exists throughout the club rather than solely within its hooligan element. As the de facto anthem of its supporters, 'No One Likes Us' inevitably speaks to the common experience of Millwall fans regardless of their association with football-related violence; at football matches it is chanted by hooligans and regular fans equally, with its lyrics found on banners and fan apparel worn by the majority of supporters (Woods 2011). By adopting 'No One Likes Us' as an anthem and embracing their thuggish reputation, Millwall fans demonstrate their willingness to accept the negative public opinion on their club and surrender to a defensive siege mentality.

Thanatos and the death drive in south London

Millwall's predominantly white working-class fan base has undoubtedly been subject to a siege mentality since the rise of modern football hooliganism in the late 1970s. Even before the club was targeted as a hotbed of hooliganism, Millwall and the wider south London region experienced sociocultural stratification that isolated the community and portrayed it as both squalid and disreputable (Quindlen 2004). As the club's reputation for violence increased throughout the 1970s and 1980s, so did the siege mentality that existed within the ranks of its supporters; during a period when public perception would have theoretically driven casual fans away from Millwall, the club continued to thrive at a grassroots level and maintained its position as a well-supported team within the community (Maguire 2006). Strong support for Millwall is even more surprising when compared against the team's performance during the critical period after the release of the BBC's report on

hooliganism: during the 1978–79 season, Millwall was relegated to Division 3 where it remained due to the team’s relatively poor performance until it was once again promoted to Division 2 during the 1984–85 season (Statistics index 2016). To have sustained support despite the team’s lack of success on the pitch and the overwhelmingly negative depiction of its supporters, Millwall relied heavily on the siege mentality that had developed within its fan base and served as the basis of group identity within the club. Given community opinion on the Millwall football club it became almost masochistic to identify as a Millwall supporter, calling into question the motivations of the supporters that remained part of this group during the rise of hooliganism in modern British football.

If the continued support of Millwall during the 1970s and early 1980s is taken as a manifestation of innate masochism within its fan base, an application of Freud’s Thanatos theory could provide insight into the factors contributing to this collective state of mind. Freud proposed the existence of a ‘death drive’ – referred to as ‘Thanatos’ – in his 1920 essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*; this essay built upon previous Freudian philosophy which outlined the existence of ‘Eros’ or the instinct towards survival, sex and other life-producing behaviours. In contrast, Freud believed that the death drive led human beings to engage in self-destructive activities as a subconscious way of returning to a lifeless, inanimate state. Freud initially believed that behaviour presenting as masochistic were actually a form of sadism directed at the individual’s ego; in establishing a pretext for the death drive, he reconsidered this understanding and claimed that it was possible for an individual to behave in a self-destructive manner based on an innate self-directed masochism (Freud 1987: 328). Freud’s work on masochistic behaviour essentially provided a new paradigm through which human behaviour can be understood. Rather than

accepting that human nature essentially results in people acting in their own best interest, the potential for subconsciously self-destructive actions should be considered an equally likely motivating factor.

The principles of the Thanatos theory can be observed through the behaviour of Millwall supporters in a range of ways that demonstrate the inherently self-destructive nature of belonging to such a fandom. To determine whether identification as a Millwall fan classifies as masochistic behaviour, it is essential to determine the potential benefit that may arise from being a member of such a group; in order to do so, support for the football club should be measured against both the team's on-field performance and any benefit that may arise from being a supporter independently of football. As previously noted, the Millwall football team faced relegation to Division 3 and relatively poor performance in the period directly following the release of the BBC's documentary on the club's hooligan element; this documentary in itself was responsible for sparking a significant community backlash against Millwall supporters and casting them as the chief villains of British football (Clare 1977). Given the context, it is clear that identification as a Millwall fan during this period provided little in the way of a positive experience; in fact, one of the only apparent benefits of Millwall fandom during this period is membership of the group itself. The siege mentality that formed around Millwall fans inevitably contributed to the formation of close bonds between members of the 'inner-circle' that extended beyond the realm of football and provided a sense of inclusion to an otherwise marginalized south London population.

Football-related violence as Thanatos directed outwards

Masochism and the tendency towards self-destruction formed the basis of Freud's Thanatos theory; however his later additions built upon his understanding of the death drive in a way that can be directly applied to Millwall supporters. Three years after *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* was published, Freud attempted to account for aggression and violence as an aspect of the death drive; in *The Ego and the Id*, Freud claimed that the death drive often expressed itself 'as an instinct of destruction directed against the external world' (Freud 1987: 381). He went on to suggest that the libido – or the 'Eros' drive, as identified by Freud – served as a mediating factor in the death drive, externalizing the inherent sense of masochism and transforming it into a destructive instinct rather than one of self-destruction. The destructive instinct was heavily linked with another facet of Freud's Thanatos theory: the concept of a repetition compulsion that drove people to subconsciously relive or repeat traumatic incidents in direct contravention of the pleasure principle outlined in the 'Eros' theory (Loewald 1971). Freud noted that the repetition compulsion manifested in a range of ways including what was referred to as the 'destiny neurosis'; this manifestation of the repetition compulsion occurred when an individual displays character traits that cause them to engage repeatedly in particular kinds of behaviour, which allow for these traits to be expressed (Freud 1987: 293). This repetition compulsion can be seen as an underlying factor in a range of self-destructive behaviours, not the least of which being the kind of ritualized violence that was widespread throughout British football during the rise of hooliganism.

Football hooligans may only consist of a small portion of total Millwall supporters; however their impact on the overall group identity of the club's fan base is without doubt. As the primary function of hooliganism is to engage in violent conflict, Freud's theory that

the death drive can often result in a destructive instinct is of paramount importance in order to understand the role of violence within the fandom. Freud's position was that the tendency towards destruction was an external manifestation of internalized masochism; while masochism traditionally takes place within the physical realm, it could be determined that knowingly supporting a club whose supporters are roundly denigrated within the community could be perceived as a form of social masochism (De Monchy 1950). Siege mentality at Millwall is based on the club's negative position within the football community and – as such – the pervasiveness of violence at the club could be seen as a rational response to perceived victimization. Ritualized football hooliganism also serves to validate Freud's belief in destiny neurosis and the repetition compulsion. Any violent altercation between opposing football supporters is a naturally traumatic experience; the compulsion to repeat such trauma on a weekly basis over a number of years clearly reflects what Freud described as a pathological need to express character traits like aggression with regularity (Freud 1987: 293). If viewed through a Freudian prism, it could be determined that Millwall's hooligan reputation derives from a form of social masochism, with the repetition compulsion causing this internal conflict to be expressed as externalized aggression taking the form of ritualized football-related violence.

Millwall as a symbolic 'death' – Lacan's approach to Thanatos

Freud's comprehensive theory on the death drive provides considerable insight into the prevalence of violence within Millwall's supporter base; however in its basic form it fails to account for the majority of fans that do not engage in football-related violence. The externalization of aggression may not be the norm amongst the club's fans; however this does not negate the concept that identification as Millwall supporter derives from the kind

of masochism outlined in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Freud 1922). In order to account for the non-hooligan element of the Millwall fan community, it is essential to delve further into the theory of the death drive by going beyond Freud's initial analyses; well-regarded psychoanalyst Lacan (1966) adopted Freud's belief in the death drive within his own work, adapting the largely biological aspects of the original philosophy to suit his own academic interest in the realm of symbolism. Lacan began incorporating the death drive into his own philosophy as early as 1938, wherein he defined it not as a biological imperative towards destruction but rather as a nostalgia for a simpler state of being; in doing so, Lacan immediately removes the Thanatos theory from the need for the physical or tangible expressions at the core of Freud's biological interpretation (1966: 105). Lacan went further when revisiting the issue of the death drive in 1946, linking it with the suicidal tendency of narcissism; in doing so, he implied it was possible to be self-destructive in non-physically threatening ways and that perception of oneself could prove to be the manifestation of an individual's death drive (1966: 186). This is key in understanding the inherent masochism involved in identifying as a Millwall supporter regardless of the individual's proclivity for violence. In Lacan's view of the death drive, non-tangible actions such as self-perception or group identification can be perceived as self-destructive tendencies perfectly aligned with the tenets of Freud's Thanatos theory.

Lacanian philosophy essentially organized his method of psychoanalysis into three orders of classification: the real, the imaginary and the symbolic. Lacan placed the idea of the death drive within the symbolic order, which essentially revolved around the concept that meaning exists only through relationships between a signifier and the signified (1993: 184). By placing the death drive within the symbolic order, Lacan again demonstrates his belief

that the tendency towards self-destruction need not necessarily have a physical expression; under Lacan principles, an individual acting as signifier can attribute death-like characteristics to any signified thing that they or wider societal convention may chose. In this respect, it is possible for the Millwall football club and – more pertinently – its supporters to act as a symbolic representation of ‘death’ or the self-destruction outlined within the Thanatos theory. It is not unreasonable to believe that Millwall supporters would appropriate such symbolic meaning as a collective: its pre-existing group identity is heavily influenced by sociocultural marginalization and a reputation for hooliganism that has existed throughout the club’s history (Maguire 2006). If Lacan is correct and Freudian theory can be applied in a non-physical context, then it is possible to perceive identification with Millwall supporters as a manifestation of the death drive without requiring actual hooliganism as a prerequisite; if masochism is defined as taking actions that would harm oneself, it is reasonable to suggest that knowingly entering into a group whose identity is predicated upon a siege mentality is in itself a symbolic form of sociocultural self-destruction. Although the hooligan element at Millwall football club more obviously demonstrate the self-destructive tendencies of Freud’s Thanatos theory, accepting Lacan’s interpretation on the death drive as symbolic allows for a broader understanding of the phenomenon throughout the broader, non-violent supporters of the club.

Conclusion

The reputation of Millwall football club as a haven for hooliganism and violence during the 1970s and 1980s is such that it would be easy to perceive the team’s supporters as thuggish brutes; indeed, it is this depiction of Millwall fans within the mainstream media that has contributed largely to the club’s marginalization within British society that has

existed since this period several decades ago. Millwall supporters have largely accepted being cast in the role of the villains of the football community, adopting chants and slogans that reflect the siege mentality that developed around the club during the rise of hooliganism in the latter half of the twentieth century. This siege mentality was not solely related to the public perception of Millwall football club itself; social stratification existed long before the club developed its hooligan reputation, with the white working classes of south London facing considerable marginalization well before the commencement of the epoch of hooliganism in the 1970s.

Freud argued that internalized masochism often resulted in externalized aggression directed at breaking down prevailing sociocultural constructs. This externalized aggression can undoubtedly be seen through the violent actions of Millwall's hooligan element, who have been seemingly compelled to repeat the very kind of anarchic violence that has informed the negative portrayal of Millwall fandom since the rise of the F-Troop in the 1970s. It is not only the hooligan contingent that reflect aspects of the death drive, however; Lacan's belief that the death drive existed within the symbolic order provides the scope to view the affiliation of non-violent Millwall fans as a form of cultural self-destruction in itself. It could be argued that knowingly being part of such a group is a form of cultural self-harm akin to the physical manifestations Freud described when he originated the Thanatos theory. It is impossible to determine the motivations of each individual Millwall supporter, however when taken as a collective it is clear that the siege mentality that developed within the fandom amidst the socio-economic turmoil of the 1970s and 1980s has manifested in a form of masochism in keeping with the conditions of Freud's death drive theory.

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